

Coke ban lifted

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Published: Thursday, February 5, 2009

Updated: Friday, February 6, 2009

Move over, Pepsi! The University Senate voted 28-22 yesterday to lift NYU's ban on Coca-Cola products, ending a three-year embargo on the soft drink.

In December 2005, the Senate passed a resolution banning the sale of Coca-Cola products until the company agreed to an independent investigation of its alleged involvement in the killing of union leaders at its Colombian bottling plants.

Last March, Senate Public Affairs Committee Chairman Arthur Tannenbaum — whose committee had been tasked with monitoring Coke's progress since the ban was enacted — introduced a motion to lift the ban after the Coca-Cola Company agreed to an assessment of its business practices by the International Labour Organization, an agency of the United Nations that handles labor issues.

However, at the center of the Senate's conflict was whether the ILO investigation satisfied the ban's criteria for an independent assessment of its complicity in human rights violations against the Colombian union. The decision to lift the ban was tabled pending further discussion within the Senate and its constituency.

Supporters of the ban have argued two points — that the ILO investigation focused on Coca-Cola's current practices and ignores the allegations over union workers, and that the involvement of Edward Potter, both an ILO member and Coke's director of global labor relations, taints the ILO probe with a conflict of interest.

But opponents of the ban have said they're exasperated with waiting for an investigation that will satisfy the ban's criteria and that students' right to free economic choice outweighs the university's moral duty.

Justin Lee, chair of the Senate's Student Senators Council, had a mixed reaction to yesterday's decision.

“I think people were frustrated with the fact that we've been discussing this so much and that they believe that the ILO report is probably the best that we're going to get,” Lee said. “I think that if we were to look for another independent investigation, we would at least open the possibility to getting a further investigation.”

NYU law student Tom Fritzsche, who supported the ban, said he thought the Senate was “misled” about the feasibility of conducting an investigation that would have met the ban’s terms.

Owen Moore, NYU’s director of dining services, previously said that if the ban were lifted, Pepsi would continue to be served alongside Coca-Cola.

According to Moore, NYU students could begin to see Coca-Cola products on shelves in five to 10 business days.